

Stepping Stones

Inspection report for early years provision

Unique Reference Number	EY292630
Inspection date	02 November 2007
Inspector	Chris Scully
Setting Address	C/O United Utilities, Lingley Mere, Great Sankey, Warrington, WA5 3LP
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Registered person	The DAN Leisure Group Limited
Type of inspection	Integrated
Type of care	Full day care

ABOUT THIS INSPECTION

The purpose of this inspection is to assure government, parents and the public of the quality of childcare and, if applicable, of nursery education. The inspection was carried out under Part XA Children Act 1989 as introduced by the Care Standards Act 2000 and, where nursery education is provided, under Schedule 26 of the School Standards and Framework Act 1998.

This report details the main strengths and any areas for improvement identified during the inspection. The judgements included in the report are made in relation to the outcomes for children set out in the Children Act 2004; the National Standards for under 8s day care and childminding; and, where nursery education is provided, the *Curriculum guidance for the foundation stage*.

The report includes information on any complaints about the childcare provision which Ofsted has received since the last inspection or registration or 1 April 2004 whichever is the later.

The key inspection judgements and what they mean

Outstanding: this aspect of the provision is of exceptionally high quality

Good: this aspect of the provision is strong

Satisfactory: this aspect of the provision is sound

Inadequate: this aspect of the provision is not good enough

For more information about early years inspections, please see the booklet *Are you ready for your inspection?* which is available from Ofsted's website: www.ofsted.gov.uk.

THE QUALITY AND STANDARDS OF THE CARE AND NURSERY EDUCATION

On the basis of the evidence collected on this inspection:

The quality and standards of the care are satisfactory. The registered person meets the National Standards for under 8s day care and childminding.

The quality and standards of the nursery education are satisfactory.

WHAT SORT OF SETTING IS IT?

Stepping Stones Nursery registered in 2004. It is one of nine nurseries owned and managed by a limited company. It operates from within a modular building within the Lingley Mere site of United Utilities, Great Sankey, Warrington. The children are cared for in nine age appropriate rooms. The nursery is open to employees on site and to the general public. A maximum of 94 children may attend the nursery at any one time. The nursery operates Monday to Friday, from 08.00 to 18.00 all year round.

There are currently 83 children from birth to five years on roll. Children attend for a variety of sessions. There are currently 19 children in receipt of funding for early years education. The setting is able to support children with learning difficulties or disabilities, or for whom English is an additional language.

There are 21 members of staff who work directly with the children, of whom nine hold an appropriate early years childcare qualification. Two members of staff are currently undertaking National Vocational Qualifications. The setting receives support from Sure Start early years.

THE EFFECTIVENESS OF THE PROVISION

Helping children to be healthy

The provision is satisfactory.

Children are cared for in a generally clean environment. The children are developing an understanding of good hygiene routines, as they confidently line up to wash their hands before meals and snacks. Staff provide gentle reminders to children when they forget to wash their hands after visiting the bathroom. This promotes children's learning and minimises the risk of cross infection. However, staff do not always notice when a child has a dirty nose, which hinders the children's well-being. A sick child policy is in place and is implemented well by staff. This means children receive appropriate care and attention should they become unwell at the setting.

A high number of staff are trained in first aid. This ensures children's accidents or incidents are handled well and receive suitable care and attention. Appropriate nappy changing procedures are in place, which meet the individual needs of the children. Most children are able to sleep or rest according to their own needs and routines. All bedding is laundered each day, which effectively minimises the risk of cross infection. Children's physical development is progressing appropriately. Older children are skilled at using a wide range of wheeled resources, slides and climbing equipment. However, due to a lack of planning for outdoor play some children are not sufficiently challenged. Babies have an appropriate range of resources, which promote their development; for example, babies demonstrate increasing control as they pull themselves up on furniture to practise balancing and walking. Children use a range of small tools, such as cutlery with increasing dexterity.

Children enjoy a mainly healthy and nutritious diet. All meals are freshly prepared each day by the cook and conform to the specific dietary needs of the children. For example, babies' meals are appropriately blended to meet their developmental needs. Young babies are held whilst having a bottle, which enables them to feel secure and creates a bond with their carer. Children have independent access to fresh drinking water in order to keep themselves refreshed. However, younger children are not successfully identifying their own cup, which means on occasion they drink from another child's cup, which does not promote their health and well-being.

Protecting children from harm or neglect and helping them stay safe

The provision is satisfactory.

Children are cared for in welcoming environment, where their art work and photographs are prominently displayed. This successfully fosters the children's sense of belonging. Children are kept safe through the appropriate organisation of the available space. They are able to move freely and safely throughout the setting. Furniture, such as tables, chairs and cots, are adequate to meet the differing needs of the children and enable them to eat, rest and play comfortably with their friends. Toys are appropriately distributed throughout the nursery so that they are appropriate to the differing ages and developmental stages of the children. Thus, they provide suitable stimulation and challenge to help most children progress through their learning and development.

Identified risks, which include the damaged fence panels, rust on the railings within the outdoor areas and damage to toilet doors in the pre-school have been reported. However, no remedial action has been taken to minimise risks until it has been suitably resolved. Reporting systems are in place, however, considerable time lapses before any action is taken by the maintenance department. This places children at risk. Other identified risks, such as the damaged mirror,

broken cupboard doors and worn carpets have not been effectively addressed. Having said that, staff are aware of the importance of reporting any concerns to the manager, who in turn passes this information to the appropriate persons for attention.

Staff have a sound understanding of child protection issues. This is supported by the comprehensive child protection policy, which conforms to the Local Safeguarding Children's Board and the implementation of ongoing training for all staff. Staff are aware of the potential signs and symptoms of abuse or neglect and the action they must take in order to protect children from harm. However, some staff are not clear on the action to take should an allegation be made against a member of staff.

Helping children achieve well and enjoy what they do

The provision is good.

Children are happy and settled at the nursery. They enter cheerfully and are quickly absorbed in self chosen play and learning activities. Staff caring for younger children plan an effective range of interesting activities using the 'Birth to three matters' framework. They make regular observation of the children and identify what they know and can do. However, they are not consistently identifying the next steps in the children's learning. Babies and children are keen to explore new play opportunities, such as playing with shaving foam. The babies are keen to explore the texture of the foam and giggle as they try and eat it.

Older children enjoy the opportunities to experiment with sand and water. They happily drop the chalk into the water and squeeze them through their hands and watch as the water changes colour. Children squeal in delight and shout 'splash!' as they drop items into the water. All children receive good levels of support and positive interactions from staff. This means children build a secure bond with their carers and are confident to take part in activities. Staff provide good support to children who are feeling unsettled and provide appropriate care and support. This effectively enables children to settle and to become once again engaged in the activities. Younger children enjoy singing a range of songs and enthusiastically join in to action rhymes, such as 'I'm a dingle dangle scarecrow.' Babies enthusiastically dance along to music and smile broadly when their favourite song is played.

Nursery education

The quality of teaching and learning is satisfactory. Staff have a sound understanding of the Foundation Stage and how children learn. However, this is not supported by the recently revised planning. As the spider graph system whilst highlighting the children's input into the planning does not effectively show how the six areas of learning are covered, the expected learning outcomes or the differentiation and challenge to support children's individual needs. Having said that, children are actively engaged in a wide range of fun and interesting activities that generally support their development. Regular observations are undertaken to identify what children know and can do. However, the next steps in their learning are not recorded, which means some opportunities for extending children's learning are missed and the information is not used to inform future planning.

Children enter the room happily and are soon engaged in self chosen play and learning experiences. They are becoming interested and eager learners who are keen to explore new ideas, such as examining the frog they discovered in the garden. They are keen to talk to visitors and enthusiastically regale them with tales of the recent Halloween party and their costumes. Children confidently see to their own needs, such as independently accessing the bathroom

and attempting to put on coats and shoes to go outdoors. They are developing an understanding of their own cultures and beliefs and those of others, through planned events and discussions with staff. Children are becoming confident speakers both in small and large groups. They enjoy looking at books, turn the pages correctly and 'read' aloud to their friends. Children recognise the letter sounds of their name, for example, my name begins with a 'J'. Children are beginning to practise mark making and writing skills. However, they have limited opportunities to write for a purpose within the different areas and some children do not regularly enter the writing or mark making areas.

Children's mathematical skills are developing appropriately. They enjoy the opportunities to count themselves as they enter and leave the building to play outdoors. However, further opportunities to count for a purpose and to recognised numerals and their meaning is limited. Children have some opportunities to solve simple problems, such as more or less than. Children use mathematical language, such as bigger and smaller in their everyday language. Their computer and mouse skills are progressing appropriately. They enjoy the opportunities to create their own pictures on the computer and print them. More able children confidently identify that they are out of paper and ask the staff to refill the printer. Children are developing an understanding of other everyday technology, as they take photographs with the digital camera. These are attractively displayed in the room, but are displayed too high for the children to freely access. Children have good opportunities to learn about living and growing things. They examine creatures and insects that they find in the garden and are keen to tell visitors about the vegetables and sunflowers that they attempted to grow in the summer.

Children's imagination is progressing well. They are keen to explore the various role play areas and enjoy the opportunities to create new hairstyles within the hairdressers shop. They are confident to delegate roles to other children and include them in their play, for example, who is it to wash the clients hair and who is to cut the hair. They use language appropriately to describe what they can see, one child explains that the puppet has red hair and 'you get that from gingerbread!' Children have good opportunities to explore their creativity through a range of art and craft activities, such as creating their joint masterpiece on canvas. The children worked together to create their design using paint. Children are keen to use their imagination when playing games, such as 'put the lid on the box.' This successfully enables the children to decide upon what is trapped in the box and once the lid is removed to enthusiastically become that animal whether it is a giraffe, lion or elephant.

Helping children make a positive contribution

The provision is good.

Children's individual needs and circumstances are known and are effectively met by the staff. This means staff are able to provide appropriate care and support to all children. Children are respected as staff listen to what they have to say and plan activities according to their specific interests and ideas. Children learn about different cultures and beliefs through planned activities during the year, such as Chinese New Year, Diwali and Christmas. This is further supported by a wide range of resource material in the pre-school room and corridors. The children's spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is fostered. However, younger children do not always have independent access to resources promoting diversity and the wider world. This hinders their ability to learn about the wider world. Children learn about their local community as they take part in charity events, such as sponsored toddles and some planned activities.

Children are well behaved and respond well to the staff's requests. All children are very familiar with the daily routines. This enables children to feel safe, secure and gain a sense of time as

staff explain that their parents will be here for them after tea. Older children enjoy the opportunities to undertake small jobs, such as helping to set the table or put out the toys, this successfully fosters the children's self-esteem. The setting is not currently caring for children with learning difficulties or disabilities, but has done so successfully in the past. Clear procedures are in place for supporting children with learning difficulties or disabilities. The settings special educational needs coordinator liaises well with staff, other agencies and schools to ensure children's needs are met well.

The partnership with parents and carers is good. Parents are provided with a wealth of information about the setting and the type of care and education their child can expect to receive. All consents are in place, which means children are cared for in line with their parents wishes. Plans of activities are prominently displayed in all of the rooms and daily discussions inform parents about their child's day and progress. This is further enhanced by the regular opportunities to examine their child's developmental profile at home. This provides a starting point for further discussions on the children's progress. Parents are invited into the nursery for open days and other events throughout the year. They are encouraged to support their child's learning by providing items from home and discussing current topics, such as autumn. Parents state they are very happy with the care and education their children receive. They confirm that their children enjoy coming to the nursery and have come on 'in leaps and bounds'.

Organisation

The organisation is satisfactory.

Children are cared for by qualified and experienced staff. All staff undertake an induction programme when they commence employment, which enables them to develop a clear understanding of their roles and responsibilities. However, the induction procedure does not include information relating to the staff's understanding and awareness of the child protection policy. Clear vetting procedures are in place, which means children are cared for by appropriate persons.

Policies and procedures which contribute to the children's health, safety and well-being are in place. Although, the systems for reducing identified risks are not always effective. The complaints policy contains inaccurate information regarding the regulators role in investigating complaints and does not include the correct information for parents regarding the contact details of the regulator. Children and staff's attendance is well recorded. Documentation relating to children's accidents and the administration of medication is appropriately maintained.

The leadership and management is satisfactory. Staff have not attended any recent training on the Foundation Stage, but do regularly attend cluster group meetings to discuss new ideas and ways of working. Additional support is provided by the advisory teacher from Sure Start. Some time is set aside each week to enable staff to compile the following weeks plans, although this can on occasion be sporadic. Regular team meetings keep staff informed of current good practice guidance and enables them to meet with other colleagues to discuss new ideas.

Overall the provision meets the needs of the range of the children for whom it provides.

Improvements since the last inspection

Following the last inspection one action and four recommendations were raised. The action related to staff's understanding of the child protection policy and procedures. The

recommendations were in relation to the lunchtime arrangements, medication record, visitors book and the named person for behaviour management.

All staff have undertaken child protection training and have a wide range of information to support their understanding of child protection issues. The lunchtime routines have been revised to ensure all children remain seated when eating. The medication record is in place and is well maintained. A visitors book is in place and all visitors are required to sign in and out of the setting. Staff are now aware that the manager is the named person for behaviour management issues.

In addressing these issues the setting has improved upon the children's health, safety and well-being.

Complaints since the last inspection

Since the last inspection there have been no complaints made to Ofsted that required the provider of Ofsted to take any action in order to meet the National Standards. The provider is required to keep a record of complaints made by parents, which they can see on request. The complaints record may contain complaints other than those made to Ofsted.

THE QUALITY AND STANDARDS OF THE CARE AND NURSERY EDUCATION

On the basis of the evidence collected on this inspection:

The quality and standards of the care are satisfactory. The registered person meets the National Standards for under 8s day care and childminding.

The quality and standards of the nursery education are satisfactory.

WHAT MUST BE DONE TO SECURE FUTURE IMPROVEMENT?

The quality and standards of the care

To improve the quality and standards of care further the registered person should take account of the following recommendation(s):

- revise the systems with regards to younger children independently accessing fresh drinking water to minimise the risk of cross infection
- revise the arrangements for monitoring identified risks and repairs to include monitoring systems that ensure that remedial action is taken until repairs are completed
- review the induction procedures to ensure child protection is covered within the first week of employment and revise the complaints policy.

The quality and standards of the nursery education

To improve the quality and standards of nursery education further the registered person should take account of the following recommendation(s):

- revise the planning systems to ensure that weekly planning makes clear what children are expected to learn, how their differing needs are met and they are sufficiently challenged

- revise the assessment systems to clearly identify the next steps in the children's learning and how this is used to inform future plans
- provide more opportunities for children to recognise numerals and their meaning and to explore simple mathematical problems.

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